

THE
National Liberal Federation
of
India.

Twentieth Sessions, Bombay 30th, 31st December 1938

Speech by Sir Cowasjee Jehangir, Bart, K.C.I.E., M.L.A.
Chairman of the Reception Committee.

FRIDAY the 30th DECEMBER, 1938

•

THE National Liberal Federation of India

*Speech by Sir Cowasjee Jehangir, Bart.,
K.C.I.E, M.L.A., Chairman
of the Reception Committee*

Friday, the 30th December, 1938

Brother Delegates, Ladies & Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Reception Committee of the National Liberal Federation of India, I have the honour to offer you a most cordial welcome to our City of Bombay

During the year we have lost two distinguished Liberals in the persons of the Hon'ble Sir Phiroze Sethna and Pandit Jagat Narain of Lucknow. Sir Phiroze was a past President of our Federation and took a most active part in the political, industrial and social life of the country. He was known throughout India as an indefatigable worker. Sincere and honest in the principles he believed in, and which he fearlessly advocated through the Press, from the platform and in the Council of State, where he served from its inception to the end, he died in harness. Pandit Jagat Narain, the well-known lawyer of Lucknow, was a colleague as a Minister of our distinguished friend Mr. Chintamani. They both resigned their Ministerships on a question of principle, and thus set an example of independence and courage.

“Our creed is co-operation with the Government whenever practicable, and opposition to its policy and measures when the supreme interests of the motherland require it. Our guiding principle is co-operation when we can, criticise when we must. It is not criticise when we can, co-operate when we must. We deprecate opposition for the sake of opposition. Opposition must always produce excitement and unrest, and is justified only by the ample reward of all legitimate opposition, which is the redress of national grievances and the enlargement of popular rights.”

It has been asserted by many that strict constitutionalism has characterised the administration of the Congress Provinces and that the Congress has vindicated the Liberal Policy to seek political salvation on constitutional lines. We were convinced, that the only way, by which India could advance towards the goal of her ambition, was for the majority Parties in the Legislature to take office and work the Constitution with only one object in view—Service to the Country. At first the Congress considered the Constitution “unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India.” But they ultimately came round to our point of view, with the results we are now well aware of. But after all, is the line of demarcation between the Liberals and the Congress grown so faint in practice as not to justify the separate existence of a distinct political party? I assert that it would be a superficial diagnosis, which reveals in the present constitutionalism of the Congress a disappearance of those fundamental differences which go to the root of our respective political philosophies.

The mere fact that Congress Ministries, act on most occasions to-day as Liberal Cabinets would have done, or do what secures the approval

We last met in this City seven years ago when I had also the privilege of acting in the same capacity. Again it was in this City in 1918, that is exactly 20 years ago, that our first Conference took place under the Presidentship of one of our most distinguished countrymen, the late Sir Surendra Nath Bannerjee, when the late Sir Dinshaw Wachha was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. The event is now past history but it might be useful to recall the reasons that actuated a large number of our countrymen, amongst whom were several, who may well be called the Founders of the Indian National Congress, to secede from the old political organisation, working for which they had spent the best part of their lives, and to establish a separate political organisation to carry on political work, guided by the same principles as they had maintained and preached for years past. They were convinced that their past political work, governed by those principles, had yielded rich fruit in the shape of the epoch making pronouncement by His Majesty's Government in 1917, followed by the Reforms which came into force in 1921. Many of those who took part in our proceedings are, alas, no more with us, but we are thankful to Providence that we still retain the services of men like Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, Srinivasa Sastri, Sir P. S. Shivswamy Iyer, and C. Y. Chintamani. Looking over the list of the Reception Committee of those days, I notice the names of two of our most distinguished and active politicians of to-day. Mr. Bhulabai J. Desai and the Hon'ble Mr. A. B. Latthe.

The reasons for the split in the Congress Organisation 20 years ago is well-known to most of you. After the lapse of these years we may well examine the principles we stand for, and the reasons for our existence as a separate entity to-day. Sir Surendra Nath Bannerjee in his address in 1918 laid down that:

"Our creed is co-operation with the Government whenever practicable, and opposition to its policy and measures when the supreme interests of the motherland require it. Our guiding principle is co-operation when we can, criticise when we must. It is not criticise when we can, co-operate when we must. We deprecate opposition for the sake of opposition. Opposition must always produce excitement and unrest, and is justified only by the ample reward of all legitimate opposition, which is the redress of national grievances and the enlargement of popular rights."

It has been asserted by many that strict constitutionalism has characterised the administration of the Congress Provinces and that the Congress has vindicated the Liberal Policy to seek political salvation on constitutional lines. We were convinced, that the only way, by which India could advance towards the goal of her ambition, was for the majority Parties in the Legislature to take office and work the Constitution with only one object in view—Service to the Country. At first the Congress considered the Constitution "unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India." But they ultimately came round to our point of view, with the results we are now well aware of. But after all, is the line of demarcation between the Liberals and the Congress grown so faint in practice as not to justify the separate existence of a distinct political party? I assert that it would be a superficial diagnosis, which reveals in the present constitutionalism of the Congress a disappearance of those fundamental differences which go to the root of our respective political philosophies.

The mere fact that Congress Ministries, act on most occasions to-day as Liberal Cabinets would have done, or do what secures the approval

of the Liberal Party, is no argument in favour of not enunciating the principles on which the two political parties differ fundamentally. We may be one on numerous problems, but so are most political parties in the other parts of the world. We may approve of some legislative or administrative measures of the Congress Ministries, whilst disagreeing with others; yet in their concept of India's ultimate political goal and her status in the comity of nations, in their concept of the methods of attaining that goal, and in the concept of evolution of political thought and progress, we, Liberals, continue to differ from the Congress on fundamentals.

Our ultimate political goal is "the attainment by constitutional means of Swaraj, that is to say, responsible self-government and Dominion Status for India at the earliest possible date." The Congress creed is of 'complete independence,' whatever that nebulous phrase may mean but which must imply, among other matters, that India must be left to her own resources to fight against external aggression without hope of reinforcement from Britain or the Empire. Leaving aside sentimental reasons, which may weigh with many for the adherence to this principle, we, Liberals, realise that ever since the Statute of Westminster there is no practical distinction between Dominion Status and complete Independence, and that our creed will entitle us to a measure of protection from foreign aggression which otherwise will not be available to us.

The recent developments in International politics has served to bring home to many of our countrymen, who glibly talked of independence, that the Liberal concept of India's ultimate political goal is fuller, richer, and more practicable than this cry of 'complete independence,' which, if ever attained in the near future, might result in unprovoked aggression, as has

been the fate of Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, and probably China. Examine another vital difference between the Congress and our Party. Constitutional though to-day, even to the extent of being indistinguishable from the Liberal Party, Congress has not abandoned its policy of 'direct action.' The Liberals differ from the Congress in their methods of attaining their political goal. During this very month there have been uttered threats by prominent Congressmen to postpone the advent of Federation, if need be, by a resort to Civil Disobedience and the Working Committee of the Congress itself is threatening the Princes, that if political progress within the States do not come up to the expectations of the Congress High Command, the Congress would resort to direct action. This is clear evidence to the Liberals that there has been no change either mentally or officially in Congress methods, which were once put into operation to the great detriment of the peace and progress of our Country. This is a fundamental difference on which there can be no compromise and was precisely the issue on which the great schism occurred within the Congress in 1918.

We may have been called cowards and the most uncomplimentary language may again be the order of the day, but we shall continue to warn our countrymen that direct action will not lead us to the goal of our ambitions while suffering, hardship, and disorganisation will follow in its wake. I assert that the necessity to abandon these methods, even if temporarily, by Congress is a triumph of Liberal foresight. The Liberals cannot abandon lightheartedly, for securing of a veneer of temporary political unity, a principle for which they have fought these twenty years. The Liberals from conviction believe in ordered progress. They think and feel in terms of evolution. All attempts at a temporary advance by the method

of direct action is regarded by them as definitely dangerous to ultimate political progress.

We believe that if the Congress abandoned its present method of constitutional Government, and resorted to Civil Disobedience as threatened by its President, large numbers of thinking people in India, who, while approving of the present constitutional Congress policy, would be most unwilling to subject this Country to a fresh spell of political confusion. Such people will then naturally turn to a political party which has no communal basis and which can afford a common rallying centre for the bulk of political opinion, which does not belong to the 'direct action' school. There are again a large number of politically minded persons who though they do not label themselves as Liberals approve of and follow liberal principles, and there are others who, although believing in and practising the principle of Swadeshi, refuse to bow down to the fetish of Khaddar and be forced to spin five thousand yards of yarn a year as a franchise for a political party.

It will thus be observed that distinct in its outlook on political thought, distinct in its political goal, distinct in its method of attaining political salvation and charged with distinct purposes, the Liberal Party must continue its separate political career, may be, overshadowed at times by the spectacular strides of other political parties, but always capable of fulfilling the tasks expected of it and for which it took birth.

FEDERATION.

The most important question for consideration just now before the Country is the impending Federation. The Liberal Party has never been enamoured of the scheme. It has criticised it and pointed out its defects. We have realised that it is

unlike any other—Federation that exists in the World and it may even be called illogical to have a—Federation, some of the component parts of which are based on Democracy, whilst the others are based on Autocracy. Moreover the position in India is changing from day to-day. New factors have arisen which require careful consideration and analysis. All parties agree that the unity of India is an essential factor for its happiness, progress and prosperity; that without unity it cannot take its proper place in the British Commonwealth of Nations and in the World.

The Congress demands certain changes before they commit themselves to give a helping hand to the Federation. Their main demand at present appears to be with regard to the Indian States. They believe that the introduction of the elective principle in the Indian States is essential. One can understand their point of view. Without this they see no hope of getting a clear majority in the Federal Chambers. Such a majority can only be obtained firstly, if they win nearly every seat they contest in the—General Constituencies in British India, and secondly, if they succeed in getting a large number of Muslims to stand and win on the Congress ticket in Muslim Constituencies, or thirdly, if they get the representatives of Indian States to join the Congress. While they may succeed in winning most of the seats in the General Constituencies in—British India, they are not at all hopeful of direct support from the other two sources. They can therefore never be in an absolute majority. And hence their demand for the elective principle in Indian States, whereby Congress candidates could stand and would most probably succeed in a very large majority of the Constituencies.

On the other hand, the Muslim League has declared in unequivocal terms that it is not prepared to allow any change

with regard to the system of representation of the Indian States. No political party that believes in Democracy can possibly oppose the elective principle but still one can understand the Muslim League point of view. If the Indian States return Congress candidates in large numbers as they are likely to do, the weightage given to the Muslim Community in the Central Legislatures would be reduced and would further tend to make the Muslim block a more ineffective minority.'

We must face realities. We 'cannot continue for long with an irresponsible Central Government with the Provinces under Ministries responsible to their Legislatures. We cannot expect the administration of the Indian States to come into line with British Indian Provinces within the next couple of years, specially with regard to their representation in the Central Legislatures. His Majesty's Government have already declared that while they will not oppose, they will not bring any direct or indirect pressure upon the States to make such radical changes as will meet with the approval of the Congress. On the other hand the Muslim League would strongly oppose if His Majesty's Government suggested any other method of treatment. Therefore as matters stand at present it appears that the only chance of forming a Government under the Federation, which can hope to command a majority, is by a coalition between the Congress, the Muslim League, and other Groups.

There are some other objections to the Federation which have been pointed out on numerous occasions by all parties. Several of them also apply to the Constitution under which the Provinces are administered to-day. Experience has shown, as was pointed out by many Liberals, that although the objections seems formidable on paper, they would not be so in practise. It was pointed out that if any of the safeguards were used by the

Governors in an unreasonable and provocative manner the Ministries always had the remedy of resignation with few chances of the Governor being able to form another Ministry. In practice this has turned out to be correct for there has not been any such interference. The same applies though perhaps in a lesser degree to the Centre. I do not think it is possible to demand that the administration of the defence of the Country should be handed over immediately to the Federal Government, but there is no reason why the Federal Government through its Finance Minister should not exercise considerable influence on the policy and administration of the Department. Conventions will rapidly grow up, whereby the Defence Department will be forced to take the Federal Government more and more into their confidence. In the same way there is no reason to believe that the influence of the Federal Government will not be felt on the administration of the Railways, and the same will apply to the exchange policy of Government. At the same time it must never be forgotten that if the Federal Government has behind it a substantial majority in the Legislatures, it will be very difficult for any Governor-General to oppose the Government on any fundamental issue. The Government can always resign, and if the issue on which they resign appeals to the Legislatures and to the Country at large, the Viceroy will find himself confronted with a very embarrassing situation which he will make every effort to avoid. After the experience that has been gained in the Provinces I do not think any political party would be justified in refusing to work the Constitution. It shortly therefore boils down to this, that either the Indian States agree to the introduction of the elective principle which they are not likely to do, or there must be a Coalition Government.

I am perfectly aware of the views of the extreme Left Wing in the Indian political life. They do not desire that any constitution should work. They would object even to complete independence if they felt that the Indian Government would be run on democratic lines and that Marxist principles would be unacceptable. But I am sure that the large majority realise the advantage to our Country of taking possession of the Central Government and working it in the best interests of the Motherland. The Congress however has taken up the position that it is the only political party in India that counts. They contend that theirs is the only school of thought throughout India and that they have a monopoly of patriotism and political wisdom. They profess to speak for all classes and all creeds and that all Hindus, all Muslims, all Depressed classes, and all other minorities rolled into one compose the Congress. In this we are certain they are mistaken. The very fact that they cannot capture a majority of the Muslim seats even in British India is clear evidence that the claim of the Congress to be the sole representative of Indian people is untenable. They must win over the minorities by such concessions as are demanded of them and they must be prepared to work with other political parties for the common good of the Motherland.

THE CULT OF COMMUNISM.

I am now compelled to touch upon an aspect of political life in India which is causing anxiety to a large number of our countrymen holding high positions in all political parties. The School of thought, which condemns "Imperialism" and misinterprets its meaning as domination of one country over another, does so because it objects to any form of Government constituted under the present Social Order.

During the past twelve months there has been an increase in the Communist activities throughout the country. Encouraged by the removal of the ban on various Left Wing Organisations by the Congress Governments, Communist propaganda has increased by leaps and bounds. The usual demand for the dictatorship of the proletariat after the Soviet model is frequently heard. Everyone is aware that in Russia the Communist theories were put into practise 21 years ago. Communism has had its course for full twenty years and more. With what results? The answer to this is given by Eugene Lyons, United Press Correspondent in Moscow for six years, in his book "Assignment in Utopia", recently published. He had gone to the U.S.S.R. in search of equality, freedom and justice. He left with "the sense of leaving behind me a nation trapped. Trapped physically, with blood hounds and machine guns and death sentences guarding the frontiers to prevent people escaping."

The main principle that is followed in Russia to-day is 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his work.' When Communism started in Russia the slogan was "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." This is the slogan that is being raised in India to-day, notwithstanding the fact that Russia has given a go-by to this principle.

In Russia there is as much disparity in the wages of the workers as in any capitalist country. The Communist Bosses receive salaries 40 or 50 times that of the ordinary worker. Among the workers themselves each industry has got its own categories, about 8 in number, with a marked difference in the wages for the different categories. There is very little difference between Communism as it obtains in Russia to-day and

Capitalism. The death-knell of Communism in Russia is not confined to wages alone.

Instead of building up a classless society as was claimed by the high-priests of Communism, Russia has built up a society with new classes more in number than existed before. According to reports of visitors to Russia published in books or in the European press there are at least six different classes, each separated from the other by clear lines of demarcation.

The right of inheritance has been restored. People are encouraged to invest money in State Loans or deposit in Savings Banks. *Private incomes derived from work and savings are specifically protected by the New Constitution.*

There has been a serious break-down in every branch of Industry, and planned production exists on paper alone. The worker is ill-fed and ill-clothed, lives in a miserable room with at least six others and drags on a miserable existence without grumbling loudly, lest he should be sent to Siberia or shot forthwith. Sabotage and silent destruction of the machinery are the only courses left open to him to register his protest. The only satisfaction or compensation for all his sufferings the worker gets is to be called 'Comrade' by his Bosses. The dissatisfaction against the regime has spread so widely that since May 1937 the Russian execution squad is kept busy. Since May 1937 the Soviet Government have executed 1,200 people. Since the same date 30 of the 68 candidates for the Central Committee of the Communist Party, 9 out of the 13 Commissaries of the Russian Federal Republic, the Presidents of the 9 out of the 11 Soviet Republics, the Prime Ministers of the 9 of the 11 Republics, the heads of 12 Industrial Trusts, 4 Trade Unions, and 4 newspapers, 8 of the general staff of the Red Army, and 1200

Communist Party members have been either shot or sent to concentration camps. It is indeed a matter for thought that with the growth of Communism in Russia the number of prisoners in the slave camps also show a rapid increase. The strength of the Concentration Camps which in 1927 was 40,000 rose to 70 lacs in 1937. And among these seventy lacs were one million women. And this is happening in the land which is a model of liberty which the Communists would have as copy. We are told that such sacrifice is inevitable especially when the change over from one system to another has to be made and that all these are events of the past and that with the inauguration of the New Constitution in Russia the people there enjoy such freedom and liberty as could not be found in the most democratic form of Government.

True it is that the Constitution exists on paper. But in actual working Stalin's will is the Constitution. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press do find a place in the Constitution. But if one talks or writes anything against the regime he will be charged as a traitor and shot. The New Constitution guarantees employment to every worker in the State. This is being made much of by the Indian Communists. No doubt, unemployment has been abolished by a Decree. But the worker is deprived of all elementary freedom relating to his occupation. What is in force in Russia is industrial conscription. The worker has to accept the job that is provided for him in such place, at such wage and under such condition as determined by the bosses. He can either accept the job or starve to death. He cannot choose the place of his occupation or cannot bargain with his employer for better conditions and higher wages. Since the State is the employer and since the State is always right the worker has to accept what is offered to him.

M. Kleber Legay, a prominent French Socialist, Secretary of the French National Federation of Miners, after a visit to Russia last year stated:

"It is absolutely untrue that the lot of the Russian miners is to be envied by those in our countries. The Russian miners, all things considered, are more than fifty years behind our own. I willingly acknowledge the difficulties which face the leaders of the Russian revolution and those which still exist to-day. But I cannot understand why and with what object people have so grossly deceived us about conditions of life and work in Russia."

Do the majority in the Congress desire this state of affairs in India? If they do not, they must take strong measures to see that the uneducated and poverty stricken masses of our country are not misled by self-seeking individuals, who seeing no prospects of climbing the political ladder, take to causing, whatever may be the Government in power, as much harassment, obstruction and worry as is possible. This propaganda constitutes one of the greatest dangers to our progress both socially, financially and industrially. We realise that our tradition, culture, and our great faith in religion may make it difficult for such propaganda to succeed, but that is no reason why severe and immediate steps should not be taken against a School of Thought, which desires to upset the whole Social Order of our Country.

I have concluded my remarks. It is only left for me now to wish you all a Very Happy and prosperous New Year. We hope your visit to our City will be a pleasant one and you will return to your Homes with happy memories.